

Tennessee Department of Transportation

The Civil Rights Division is celebrating Black History Month by spotlighting employees whose exemplary work fosters the mission of the department.



Employee Spotlight: LaTonja A. Coates

Transportation Manager 1
HQ Environment Division/Outdoor Advertising

She enjoys reading, listening to music, creating unique floral arrangements, cooking, and baking. Most of all, she enjoys spending time with her husband, Carl, Sr., and children, Brandi and Carl, Jr.

Diversity quote, "We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color." – Maya Angelou

Joined TDOT Family September 1987

Tell us about a moment in Black History that influenced or shaped your career and life.

My life has been influenced and shaped by many strong Black Women (family and non-family) who have inspired me and have molded me into the strong Black Woman I am today. However, if I had to tell of a moment in Black History that has further influenced me, it would be the presence of our former First Lady, Mrs. Michelle Obama. Her quiet strength and dignity continues to remind me that, despite any obstacles, I should not be afraid to step into what is for me, with confidence and not arrogance, while at the same time inspiring others, especially those that look like me to do the same. Staying focused and being true to who I am and those I represent as a Black Woman have always been a part of the goals, I have for myself. These are some characteristics I have seen displayed in Mrs. Michelle Obama that continues to inspire me personally and professionally.

Which of the TDOT Values (Stewardship, Integrity, Safety, Consistency, Development, Innovation, Collaboration & Family) resonates with you and give an example.

Integrity and family are two of the TDOT Values that resonate strongly with me. I consistently keep in mind the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "*THE TIME IS ALWAYS RIGHT, TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT.*" As an employee with TDOT for nearly 35 years, I have learned that with any position held, integrity is a must. You must be willing to do what is right, even when no one is looking. Integrity says a lot about an individuals' character and should encourage others to do the same. I appreciate that TDOT values family and this value is reflected in the concern and care for others displayed throughout the organization. As a manager, I always try to ensure that the office atmosphere reflects these values. I make it my goal to embody TDOT's Family value by being respectful to everyone I encounter, internal and external, ensuring that both of these values are in line with and promoted by TDOT.

Why is celebrating Black History Month important?

I believe celebrating Black History should extend beyond the twenty-eight days set aside during February. Celebrating the struggles and accomplishments of African Americans from our past is important because acknowledgment is given to those that are sometimes overlooked, who have made valuable contributions that have helped build and shape America.

